NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0700 MAY 3, 1976
DOUG ROBERTS/BEIRUT

EGYPT-PLO-SYRIA

ANNCR:

PRO-PALESTINIAN STATEMENTS LAST WEEKEND BY EGYPT'S PRESIDENT ANWAR SADAT HAVE BEEN WELCOMED BY THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION. AND, AS VOA'S DOUGLAS ROBERTS REPORTS, THERE MAY NOW BE SOME CHANCE FOR A THAW IN THE STRAINED RELATIONS BETWEEN CAIRO AND THE PLO.

VOICE:

IN HIS MAY DAY SPEECH IN SUEZ CITY, PRESIDENT SADAT DESCRIBED THE WAVE OF ANTI-ISRAEL RIOTS ON THE OCCUPIED WEST BANK OF THE JORDAN RIVER AND THE OUTCOME OF RECENT MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS THERE AS A VICTORY FOR THE PLO. MISTER SADAT SAID THE WEST BANK PALESTINIANS HAVE MADE IT CLEAR THEY CONSIDER THE PLO THE SOLE LEGITIMATE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE. AND HE REPEATED HIS VIEW THAT RECOGNITION OF THE PLO IS THE KEY TO PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

MISTER SADAT'S REMARKS IN NO WAY SHOWED A CHANGE IN CAIRO'S POLICY, BUT WHAT IS NEW IS THE REACTION FROM PLO HEADQUARTERS HERE IN BEIRUT. IN AN EDITORIAL ON SUNDAY, THE PALESTINE NEWS AGENCY WAFA EXPRESSED BOTH SATISFACTION AND APPRECIATION FOR THE EGYPTIAN LEADER'S SPEECH, DESCRIBING IT AS IMPORTANT. THE EDITORIAL WENT ON TO SAY THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE WELCOMED MISTER SADAT'S REAFFIRMATION OF THE PLO AS THEIR SOLE LEGITIMATE REPRESENTATIVE.

OBSERVERS HERE SAY IT WAS THE FIRST FAVORABLE COMMENT ABOUT PRESIDENT SADAT FROM THE PLO IN EIGHT MONTHS. RELATIONS

WERE SEVERELY STRAINED WHEN EGYPT SIGNED THE SINAI DISENGAGEMENT ACCORD LAST SEPTEMBER. AND IN SUNDAY'S EDITORIAL, THE PALESTINE NEWS AGENCY REAFFIRMED THE PLO'S REJECTION OF THAT AGREEMENT.

THE EDITORIAL ALSO WELCOMED MISTER SADAT'S COMMENTS ON THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR. THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT SAID HE IS AGAINST ANY PARTITION OF THIS STRIFE-TORN NATION OR ANY MOVES DIRECTED AGAINST WHAT HE CALLED THE PALESTINIAN REVOLUTION. VARIOUS PALESTINIAN GUERRILLA FORCES ARE HEAVILY INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT IN LEBANON. RADICAL FACTIONS ARE FIGHTING WITH THE LEFT WING ALLIANCE WHILE SYRIAN BACKED UNITS ARE TRYING TO ENFORCE A TRUCE. PALESTINIAN POLITICAL LEADERS, INCLUDING PLO CHAIRMAN YASSER ARAFAT, HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN EFFORTS TO DISSOLVE THE DISPUTE BETWEEN LEBANON'S LEFT-WING ALLIANCE AND SYRIA.

IN HIS SPEECH, PRESIDENT SADAT ADOPTED WHAT SEEMED TO BE A CONCILIATORY ATTITUDE TOWARD SYRIA. LIKE THE PLO, DAMASCUS CONDEMNED THE SINAI DISENGAGEMENT ACCORD, AND OBSERVERS SAY CAIRO HAS BEEN SUSPICIOUS OF SYRIA'S NEW TIES WITH JORDAN. IN HIS MAY DAY ADDRESS, MISTER SADAT SAID THE DECISION ON WHETHER OR NOT TO RENEW THE MANDATE OF THE UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING FORCE ON THE GOLAN HEIGHTS IS ENTIRELY UP TO SYRIA. THE EGYPTIAN LEADER ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT HE HOPES DAMASCUS WILL TAKE THE INTEREST OF OTHER ARAB STATES INTO ACCOUNT WHEN MAKING THAT DECISION. THE CURRENT MANDATE FOR THE U.N. FORCE EXPIRES AT THE END OF THIS MONTH.

WHILE THE EGYPTIAN LEADER'S SPEECH RECEIVED A CAUTIOUS WELCOME FROM THE PLO, NO SUCH WELCOME WAS FORTHCOMING FROM

SYRIA. DAMASCUS GOVERNMENT LEADERS REMAIN CRITICAL OF EGYPTIAN POLICIES AND MANY PEOPLE ATTENDING MAY DAY RALLIES IN SYRIA REPORTEDLY CARRIED BANNERS DENOUNCING PRESIDENT SADAT.

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